Soy - Good or Bad for our Health?

Are soy products bad for us?

Soy products contain **phytoestrogens** and as you can probably guess by the name, they have a similar structure to estrogen and sometimes act like estrogen in the body.

There is quite a lot of concern about soy products and health effects. This is because high levels of estrogen has been linked to a higher risk of breast cancer and many people are worried that these phytoestrogens found in soy products may have a similar effect. However, studies have found that moderate consumption of soy products does not have this same effect and may even be protective against breast cancer[1].

There is very limited evidence (only two studies to date) on any negative effects of soy products on hormones. In these studies, **excessive** consumption of soy products (more than 12 serves per day) did have a negative effect on hormones.

Soy contains compounds called goitrogens and some research suggests these can suppress thyroid function. However, goitrogens are inactivated by heat (and soy products are exposed to heat) so will not have any negative effect on thyroid function.

The phytoestrogens found in soy products can inhibit an enzyme that's involved in the production of thyroid hormones. However, this will **only** occur if an individual is iodine deficient so as long as you are getting enough iodine in your diet, there is no need to worry.

What are the nutritional benefits of soy?

Soy products are a good source of protein, iron and zinc, which makes them a great alternative to meat. They also contain omega 3 fatty acids, are low in saturated fat, cholesterol free and can have a cholesterol lowering effect.

How much soy should we have?

1 serving of soy food contains approximately 7g of protein and 25mg of isoflavones. A safe amount to consumes each day is around 3 – 4 serves.

Examples of 1 serve: 120g tofu, 1 cup soymilk, 100g tempeh, 200g soy yoghurt

1. Messina, M. (2016). Soy and Health Update: Evaluation of the Clinical and Epidemiologic Literature. *Nutrients*, *8*(12), 754. doi:10.3390/nu8120754

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